

The Peter Van Ness Farmhouse
Fairfield Road*, at Passaic River
Caldwell Township, Essex County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-625

HABS
NJ
7 FAIRF.V.
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

HABS
N.J.
7- FAIRF.V
1-

The Peter Van Ness Farmhouse
Fairfield Road*, at Passaic River
Caldwell Township, Essex County, New Jersey

Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Daniel W. Blacklock

Date of Erection: About 1760; alterations 1840
and recent

Architect:

Builder: Peter Van Ness

Present Condition: As altered

Number of Stories: Two and basement in main house;
one and one-half in wing

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone masonry

Exterior walls - brownstone
to second floor, clapboards
on frame above

Interior walls - plaster
and lath on studding

Chimneys - brickwork
built into inside of gable
end walls

Roof - gable, without
dormers; wood shingle
roofing

Historical Data:

East of the airport and the village of
Fairfield, this farmhouse stands close to the
southwestern bank of Passaic River, separated from

*Also called Little Falls Road

it by the Fairfield Road* (which was laid out in 1790 and known as Dutch Lane), and between the modern Van Ness and Dey Avenues in the development called Riverview-Fairfield, Caldwell Township, at the upper boundary of Essex County. In 1798 this township was set off from Newark having originally been the third Newark land grant but this section was better known as Horse Neck and had been opened for settlement in 1699^(a). Fairfield is the oldest village in this township, the Dutch pioneers having settled here about 1720^(b).

One of the first of these was Simon Van Ness, who owned 300 acres on the northeast boundary of the village, he probably having obtained his title through early Indian Deeds. In a controversy with the Lords Proprietors of the Province, he accepted their terms and obtained from them a deed of 3 September 1744 confirming him in possession of his lands.^(b)

This Simon Van Ness had sons Hendrick, Isaac, Evert, and Simon, and sons-in-law Michael Kook and Cobey Jacobuse, the last two being of Morris County, and after his decease his real estate was divided among them in 1749.^(b) Peter Van Ness, son of Isaac, abovenamed, was evidently that "Lieutenant Peter Van Ness" who was appointed an executor of the Will of Isaac Reyken (Ryker) of Horse Neck, Essex County, dated 30 September 1768 and was apparently the testator following named, the first recorded owner of this house.

*Also called Little Falls Road

(a) Old Caldwell - A Retrospect, 1699-1926, by Benj. R. Norwood, publ. Caldwell 1927, foreword.

(b) History of Essex and Hudson Counties, New Jersey Wm. H. Shaw, 2 Vols. Phila. 1884, page 849

(#) 1 May 1701, Indians to Symon Van Ness and eight other Dutchmen, E.N.J. Deed Bk., C, P. 149

Peter Van Ness of Caldwell Township, Essex County, by his Will of 10 November 1819 proved 19 October 1820, devised to his son Jacob P. Van Ness all his lands, and appointed him an executor with son-in-law Yollas Van Ness and friend Isaac Pier. To his daughters Nelly and Mary, he bequeathed "the use of that part of my dwelling house which I now occupy as long as they remain widows".

Jacob P. Van Ness also of Caldwell Township, the son and sole heir abovenamed, in his will dated 31 March 1821 and proved 29 May 1821, states that (quote) the homestead farm whereon I now live which was bequeathed to me by the testament and last will of my father Peter Van Ness I have caused to be surveyed and laid out in lots and numbered, a map of which is herunto annexed. He then devises to son Peter J. Van Ness the lot number one to son John J. Van Ness, lots two and four to son Isaac J. Van Ness, lot number three (in which was the house) and to the wife Mehitable the use and occupation of the land and house devised to son Isaac J. Van Ness until he arrives at the age of twenty-one years, and afterwards she to have "the use of that part of the house which I now occupy during the time she remains my widow". Legacies were made to daughters Hannah, Maria, and Caty all unmarried.

Isaac J. Van Ness, the son and devisee abovenamed, of Caldwell Township, dated his will 30 June 1883, and died 27 January 1886, evidently in the house here considered. He devised all his estate in trust to his executors, his wife Ann Van Ness and Lucas R. Van Ness, the wife to have the occupation and use of the same during her lifetime, and afterwards the daughter, Mary, wife of Henry Francisco to have the same likewise, and after her death the residue of the estate to be distributed among her children after payment of legacies to each of them at age of twenty-one years.

Accordingly, by a deed of 7 June 1924, the said Mary R. Francisco, widow, of Caldwell Township, having come into possession of the property, conveyed it to Josiah Dadley of Paterson, Passaic County, in which instrument it is described as being in the Township of Caldwell, Essex County, fronting on the southwest side of Passaic River and extending southwesterly 2300 feet from it, the tract containing some 89 acres, "being the premises of which Isaac J. Van Ness died seized".

Josiah Dadley, grantee last named, being still of Paterson, with his wife Helen H., by deed of 4 September 1924, conveyed lots numbers one to nine in Block C in the map of "Riverview-Fairfield" (this Van Ness farm having thus been laid out in building lots lately) to Emil Frommholz of Paterson, describing these lots as bounded north by Fairfield Road, east by Dey Avenue, west by Van Ness Avenue, being the part of the farm on which this house stands.

Finally, Elizabeth Frommholz, widow, of the City of Paterson, New Jersey, conveyed to the present owners Daniel W. Blacklock and wife Anna H., of Lyndhurst, New Jersey, by her deed of 31 December 1937, lots number 1 to 21 being all of Block C in Riverview-Fairfield.

Architectural Analysis:

The effect of this unimposing farmhouse as originally built has been entirely changed by subsequent alterations and additions. The oldest features remaining, besides the one story masonry walls, are the door in the south front of the kitchen, composed of five bevelled edge panels in the fashion of the first half of the 18th century millwork, the pilastered mantel in that room (unusually elaborate for that location), a post-Revolution piece, and perhaps the mantel in the large parlor, this last being evidently of early 19th century work. All of the window sash are

modern replacements of the original small paned ones.

The most drastic rebuilding which entirely changed the original character of what was a good example of Dutch Colonial farmhouse came about 1840 when the probably gambrel roof with outspread eaves was either jacked up or removed to change the garret into a partitioned and finished second story having full headroom at the eaves, as shown by the frame extension and its windows above the original masonry walls. At the same time, the main entrance doorway with its glass transom and side lights was inserted to replace the original doorway, the design and details indicating its period as Greek Revival, about 1840. Likewise the wide trim to the interior passage doors, the molded box cornice at the new eaves of the roof, the baseboards at the floor line, the interior trim of the windows, further testify to the regrettable remodeling and supposed improvement of the house about that year. Finally, the sun parlor and the annex to the kitchen which disfigure the entire front have been added recently to complete the transformation.

Bibliography:

A search of title in the Essex County
Land and Probate records by Cornelius
Mc Phillips, B.A.B.S. title abstractor

Lewis R. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer